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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, INR/B
STATE PLEASE PASS TO US MISSION TO OAS FOR AMBASSADOR
MORALES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CI](#)
SUBJECT: FREI FRIENDSHIP MAIN FACTOR BEHIND INSULZA
WITHDRAWAL, CHILEAN AMBASSADOR SAYS

REF: SANTIAGO 10

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Simons for reason 1.4 (b).

11. (C) Insulza's close personal friendship with Eduardo Frei was the main reason behind his decision to withdraw from the presidential race, Insulza confidante and Chilean Ambassador to the U.S. Mariano Fernandez told Ambassador on January 6. Fernandez confirmed Insulza's earlier comments to the Ambassador (reftel) that his decision had little to do with the recent polls showing Insulza trailing behind Frei.

12. (C) Not only are Frei and Insulza close friends, Fernandez said Insulza feels indebted to Frei for launching his political career. Just six months after being appointed as Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Frei elevated Insulza to Foreign Affairs Minister during a cabinet shuffle. The move took everyone by surprise, as Insulza was a prominent Socialist party activist, but not someone widely seen as minister material. (Note: Fernandez then replaced Insulza as Undersecretary. End Note.) Insulza stayed in this position for nearly five years, moving near the end of Frei's term to a post as Minister Secretary of the Presidency. Frei's successor, Ricardo Lagos, then appointed Insulza as Minister of the Interior.

13. (C) Fernandez noted that when Insulza first talked about becoming a presidential candidate, it did not look likely that Frei would be his main rival for the Concertacion nomination. However, as the field narrowed, Insulza was reluctant to engage in a primary battle against Frei and particularly disinclined from directing a negative campaign against his former mentor.
SIMONS